

WHAT'S ON

Darker Cinders dances through ashes of Blitz

MATTHEW BOURNE'S CINDERELLA
SADLER'S WELLS
★★★★★

The music is by Prokofiev but Matthew Bourne's Cinderella at Sadlers Wells could not be further removed from the familiar fairy tale setting.

In this Cinderella the action takes place in London during World War II. The prologue is a cinema with a flickering black and white screen of Pathé News 1940.

Moments later we meet the occupants of an upper-middle class home: petite, bespectacled Cinderella (Ashley Shaw), moving with exquisite fluidity in pleated skirt and demure cardigan; her sad father, confined to a wheelchair; the over-dressed and coiffured stepsisters, the creepy stepbrothers. The alcoholic stepmother (Michela Meazza), a cross between Cruella De Vil and Joan Crawford, slithers seductively and vamps it up like crazy... to magnificent effect.

The nasty women, clutching their invitations like trophies, taunt poor Cinders for whom life

Judith Abrahams sees the classic fairytale transformed into a dark romantic fable set amid the devastation of war torn London

is so miserable. Until the fairy godfather, (Liam Mower) here called The Angel, complete with platinum hair and white satin suit leaps from the mantelpiece.

Act II features the bombing of the Café de Paris. During the Blitz in March 1941 the club received a direct hit, killing or injuring over 100 people. Designer Lez Brotherston's coup de théâtre brilliantly makes this happen in reverse, and the smoking remains of the nightclub are magically transformed into high society elegance.

Harry, The Pilot (Andrew Monaghan), is the prince, desperately seeking the owner of the glittery shoe amidst the devastated streets of central



CINDERELLA by Prokofiev ; Directed by Mathew Bourne ; Designed by Lez Brotherston ; at the Sadlers Wells Theatre, London,

Picture: JOHAN PERSSON /

London. We also encounter the London underground, prostitutes plying their trade, a convalescence home and finally, Paddington Station.

"Lez Brotherston, the company and I spent many hours researching the period and characters through old movies, documentaries and public information films" explained

Bourne.

"The Cinderella story seemed to work so well in the wartime setting. Darkly romantic in tone, it speaks of period when love was fond and lost suddenly and the world danced as if there was no tomorrow.

Stunning sets, fabulous 40's costumes, hugely talented and energetic dancers are

accompanied (just as in the old movies) by a recording of a large orchestra. Prokofiev's score here comes complete with Dolby surround sound and added air raid siren.

The closing jitterbug as the curtain came down was a triumph of choreography combined with very, very loud music.... and the audience loved it.

Theatre

HAMILTON
VICTORIA PALACE THEATRE
★★★★★

In the US, Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical Hamilton transcended theatre to become a phenomenon. Does it live up to the hype, and will it succeed here? Yes and yes. It's universal subjects, national identity crisis, parenthood, sex scandals and political rivalries, and beyond that, it's just a blisteringly great night out.

Alexander Hamilton was a penniless orphan who came to Revolutionary New York from the Caribbean – an immigrant striver, which has particular resonance now. He was George Washington's right-hand man, contributing to independence, creating a banking system and defending the new constitution.

Miranda's 2015 sung-through show blends musical theatre with hip-hop, and casts non-white actors as the

Founding Fathers. Hamilton is likened to a contemporary rapper, writing his way out of a bad situation, in this origin story of our multicultural society. It's a genius way of blowing the dust off history – and a reminder that subjective storytellers shape our relationship to the past.

Miranda's work, together with Alex Lacamoire's orchestrations, is exceptionally textured: double meanings, internal rhymes, echoes and reprises, plus the sexiest discussion of comma placement ever. But in the moment, it's pure entertainment: cabinet debates as rap battles, courtship as smooth R&B.

The charismatic recent RADA graduate Jamael Westman leads a sensational British company. He keeps Hamilton's childhood trauma fresh: barely suppressed rage and a relentless sense of mortality beneath the articulate, dangerously arrogant rebel.

Giles Terera is masterful as

his temperamental opposite frenemy, Aaron Burr, as is Obioma Ugoala's monumental but wistful Washington, Jason Pennycooke's hyperactive diva Thomas Jefferson, Michael Jibson's hilarious but psychopathic George III – whose kiss-off sounds like the EU addressing Brexit Britain – Rachelle Ann Go's powerful Eliza, and Rachel John's lightning-fast thinker, and rapper, Angelica.

Director Thomas Kail and choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler brilliantly use the ensemble to power the story, backed by a relatively simple set from David Korins, and Cameron Mackintosh's marvellously restored theatre.

Might this game-changing show turn the industry "upside down", in revolutionary fashion? There are niggles, like the downplaying of slavery, but Hamilton's joy in creation and belief in a positive legacy are irresistible.

Marianka Swain

